



Beyond Blocs: The West, Rising Powers and Interest-Based International Cooperation

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Do the West and the Rest share interests? This question is asked with evermore frequency and skepticism—as China’s defense budget grows, Brazil widens its diplomacy in the Middle East and Iran, India takes an independent stance during its UN Security Council tenure, and some US politicians resort to increasingly isolationist rhetoric. It is an especially important question with respect to US-China relations, where overoptimistic hopes for a “G-2” have been replaced by exaggerated pessimism about China’s nefarious intentions. Much hinges on the question of interests. Indeed, at stake is nothing less than the question of whether states will be able to manage our globalized world, or will instead preside over the costly erosion of a liberal international order that has served as the foundation of the last six decades of economic growth and the avoidance of war between great powers.

Two paradigms answer the question differently. The first was in vogue at the height of the global financial crisis: an “all in one boat” paradigm highlighting the global economy’s deep realities of interconnection and a powerful set of associated shared interests that trumps all other sources of tension and facilitates cooperation between the West and the Rest. The second paradigm—traditional great power realism—asserts that the rise of a new power necessarily produces tension with the established power; even shared economic interests can be eclipsed by a combination of security

dilemmas and nationalist sensitivities. History provides evidence for both paradigms.

In *Power and Responsibility*, Steve Stedman, Carlos Pascual, and I argued that neither simplistic versions of the “common boat” nor deterministic realism give a complete picture. Rather, we saw an opportunity for a two-pronged strategy to shape the coming order by creating institutions to structure relations among the major powers (established and rising) and emphasizing joint action against transnational threats like terrorism—where shared interests offered both the chance to counter those threats and also to build confidence among the powers.

Looking back on this debate after three years of a US administration that has favored cooperation over contention, which argument has best held up? Certainly our assessment in 2008 in *Power and Responsibility* underestimated the spike in US/China tensions and perhaps overestimated the impact of shared interests in transnational threats beyond terrorism. That being said, a detailed examination of the record provides more evidence for a mixed picture than it does for either of the two paradigms.

During these three years, global governance arrangements have evolved rapidly and oddly. At the level of summit diplomacy and grand strategic alignments, the

consolidation of the G-20, the surprising resilience of the G-8, and the consequent deepening of the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) Summit process, leave us with a global governance system that combines features of both the “common boat” as well as “West versus Rest” structures. Likewise, recent moves to reform the international financial institutions tell a more hopeful “common boat” story, while the gridlock over reform in the United Nations has merely amplified divergent priorities and perceptions on security. Add the bizarre but telling detail that Russia is the sole nation with membership in all of these forums, and we have all the evidence we need that current governance arrangements are an accretion of crisis-driven decisions, with little basis in strategic logic.

Can we do better? It is commonplace to argue that real changes to the international order can only arise through crisis, that new institutions capable of shaping interests can only come after massive costs have already accrued. This is at best a partial reading of history. The post-WWII and post-Cold War periods are replete with examples of new institutions being established or old ones being adapted as a result of United States interests, leadership, or middle-power diplomatic entrepreneurship. Moreover, a significant segment of policy elites share a view that massive costs *have* been accrued, and change is thus necessary. Yes, the sense of urgency that drove unprecedented financial cooperation in 2009 has passed, and yes, the US Congress seems already to have forgotten several of its most basic lessons. Much of the media and blogosphere has dismissively consigned the G-20 to the multilateral ash heap. Yet a closer look gives ground for more optimism.

Scanning the spectrum of issues on which great powers cooperate, compete, or conflict shows all three modes of interaction still at play. If we can resist both the “we’re all in this together” optimism of the global financial crisis and the pervasive pessimism of 2011, the evidence suggests that there is still room for a strategy to forge a more peaceful and prosperous international order. The balance between cooperative and conflictual dynamics is not yet set. The right combination of

leadership strategies and policy choices can still help limit the risks of what David Gordon and Ian Bremmer sagely call “the G-Zero world.”

Are We in a G-8 vs. BRICS World?

The question of whether the West and the Rest share interests is actually poorly constructed. It is built on two false assumptions: presuming unity of interest within the West and also among the rising powers. The post-financial crisis diplomacy of fiscal expansion/contraction, International Monetary Fund (IMF) governance reform, currency valuation, and economic rebalancing refutes the notion that either “bloc” is bound by identical interests—or indeed that the notion of a bloc of emerging powers is meaningful at all. (A deeper question, likewise, is whether the notion of “the West” is still pertinent today, but that is a separate subject.¹)

A better formulation is this: does the United States (still the singular power in the international system) share interests with the other major powers, established or rising? This formulation leaves us open to noticing, for example, that in the second wave of the response to the financial crisis, the US resistance to hasty fiscal consolidation closely aligned with that of China and India, and was starkly in tension with that of erstwhile allies Australia, the United Kingdom, and Germany. And if India and Brazil’s decisions to abstain in votes on Security Council action in Libya are interpreted as at odds with US interests and/or security perceptions, then the same must go for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally Germany, which also abstained and refused to participate in the Libya campaign. It similarly helps us spot mounting tensions between India and China, important divergences in multilateral fora between India and Brazil, and the inability of the BRICS to rally behind an alternative IMF director candidate to Europe’s Christine Lagarde.

International politics today is thus much more complex than G-8 vs. BRICS. As will be shown below, there is ample evidence of cooperation across the so-called “West versus Rest” divide, and of tensions within the West and within the BRICS grouping, such as they are. Of course there is also evidence of tension between the West and others.

The second complexity is to distinguish among the spheres of policy. Contemporary international politics can be conceptualized as falling into five main spheres: (1) economic integration through trade and the operation of the global financial system; (2) the vital infrastructure of global networks for transport and telecommunications, on which all modern economies depend (and all of which are vulnerable to disruption, including by non-state actors); (3) the search for and consumption of energy and other scarce natural resources; (4) regional and international security, where rising powers that are unable to compete with the US military at a global level could still complicate US influence at a regional level, and where the politics of nuclear weapons continue to play an important albeit a changing role; and (5) the terrain of development, democracy promotion, and human rights—and any intervention in their defense.

These topics are often segregated in both academic and policy literature, managed by separate units of government and governed by distinct multilateral frameworks. They are intricately intertwined, however, both in the substance of the issues (how can we separate economic from political from security developments in Pakistan?), and in the politics of the bilateral relations between powers. Through the prism of these five domains of global order, we see different patterns of interest that variously align the Western and rising powers with and against each other, and with and against the United States. Different actors within and between the major powers place different priority on the spheres. Each has its own structure of interest, and thus requires different strategy, architecture, and governance.

The Semicooperative World of Transnational Threats

Starting with the question of transnational threats—specifically, the threat posed by non-state actors in terms of terrorism, piracy, organized crime, and biological insecurity—what is the level of the major powers’ shared interests in deterring them?

The first pattern worth observing here is the sustained intensive cooperation since 9/11 between

the United States, Russia, India, China, and myriad other states on combating Al Qaeda and other forms of terrorism. At times, this cooperation took the ugly form of a “you kill your terrorists and we’ll kill ours” compact. The fissure in this sphere was not between the United States and the emerging powers; far from it. Instead, the public split was between the United States and Europe over the question of the application of international legal and human rights standards in the counterterrorist endeavor.

This is not to say that the United States and the emerging powers agreed or agree on all things terrorist. Indeed, the political/ideological dispute over whether Palestinian nonstate actors are engaged in terrorism or resistance continues unabated at the United Nations—but that issue divides the United States as much from Europe as it does from the emerging powers. Operationally, though, intelligence sharing and political backing for counterterrorist moves has been remarkably steady between the United States, Russia, and the emerging powers. This is unsurprising. Terrorism poses simultaneous both to sovereign security as well as to the very infrastructural networks on which globalization depends, and the United States and the emerging powers share profound interests in protecting both.

Similar patterns of cooperation are found on piracy. It is hard to imagine a better symbol of shared interests than the US Navy patrolling alongside the Chinese, Brazilian, and Indian navies off the coast of Somalia. The fact of a UN Security Council authorization for the action completes the picture. This, too, should come as no surprise; piracy may not be a major security threat, but 7 percent of global trade passes through the Gulf of Aden, and protecting the global economy against disruption by nonstate actors is an area of deeply shared interests. That it is unsurprising, though, does not make it unimportant. Nuclear proliferation has also generated cooperation. The Nuclear Security Summit, which is rapidly being institutionalized, brought together more than 60 states across West/Rest and North/South divides commonly motivated to stem the flow of loose nuclear material to nonstate actors. More traditional

nuclear issues, though, exhibit more of the features of regional and international security competition—for example on Iran.

Biological security is more complex. At one level, the threat of biological attacks by non-state actors taps into the shared interest in deterring or forestalling any other form of terrorist attack. The related questions of public health systems and governmental response to disease outbreaks, however, can be seen as intruding on sovereignty. These are issues of some sensitivity for China, given its mishandling of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2004. That crisis revealed not just weaknesses in the Chinese state health model, but also important differences between China and the United States on such issues as the relative roles of national and international systems or the role of global monitoring mechanisms. Still, the United States and China's shared concern about improving the governance of international public health issues drew them into tough and intensive negotiations at the 2005 World Health Assembly—with both sides offering important concessions to achieve major strides in obligatory national reporting, international inspection, and global response mechanisms.

The question of fragile states is often treated as a component of the transnational threats problem, and is surely linked. But in terms of multilateral cooperation, there is an important distinction between fragile states without strategic significance for the major powers (e.g., Burundi, Liberia, and Sierra Leone) contrasted with fragile states where strategic interests are clearly at stake—including Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Nigeria. Considered properly, the latter might be topics for cooperation but also fall within the more contentious realm of geostrategy and regional security—whereas the former are optimal for significant operational cooperation through peacekeeping, for instance. Amidst all the current China-pessimism it is easy to forget, as Steve Stedman has pointed out, that China has voted 56 times since the end of the Cold War to authorize peacekeeping operations with strong

democratic governance objectives, several of which have invoked Chapter VII of the Charter to supersede sovereignty. Given the salience of sovereignty versus intervention in the debate between the West and the Rest, China's support for intrusive and coercive peacekeeping (alongside India, Brazil, South Africa, and others) is noteworthy.

The Cooperative/Competitive World of Economics and Finance

In the economic and financial sphere, as already noted, the urgency of the global financial crisis spurred intensive cooperation. Such is the contemporary attention deficit, however, that the “currency war” of 2010 prompted the media and commentariat to ask whether that cooperation was epiphenomenal, confined to moments of dire emergency. Prominent pundits on the blogosphere, for instance, proclaimed the early death of the G-20.

Cooperation on the global economy warrants a much more rigorous assessment. The response to the financial crisis was no mere coordination of already aligned policy: the major players in the G-20 took major, costly, sometimes painful measures to combine their efforts and pull the world economy back from the precipice over which it had tumbled. Nor did the initial response represent the full extent of the cooperation. The establishment of the Financial Stability Board, voting reform at the World Bank, and governance reform at the IMF swiftly followed.

In the postemergency phase, media commentary focused on thorny issues such as currency valuation and the difficulty in resolving global imbalances; both put the United States and China into tense opposition, with the United States ostensibly enjoying support from other G-7 members—but spectacularly weak support. At precisely the same time, though, the issue of governance reform at the IMF illustrated a different dimension to the relationship. There, the United States aligned itself with China, Brazil, and India to back reforms to give emerging powers more influence over IMF decision making. This put the United States at odds with Europe, which had long accepted the

need for reform in principle, but resisted in practice the reduced number of European seats that any reform scheme would necessarily entail. Far from joining the Europeans to block China and “the rest of the Rest,” the United States insisted on its view that integration of the emerging powers was critical for the IMF’s future viability—and that Europe would have to pay the price. The G-20 ultimately struck a deal that will reduce the number of European seats by two.

The G-20 also took a series of decisions that transformed the Financial Stability Forum (FSF) into a more powerful Financial Stability Board, along with new rules for the Basel group on bank regulation (so-called Basel III). Whatever the shortcomings of the FSF or Basel III compared with the need for tighter financial regulation, little of the critique relates to a “West vs. Rest” dynamic. The differences over the strength and reach of the FSF were just as deep between the United States and several European states as they were between the United States and China or India. As of this writing (Autumn 2011), the key issue on the global economic agenda is the Eurozone’s internal difficulties, and both the United States and China were offering advice and financing to help forestall sovereign defaults in Europe.

Similar patterns are found in other global economic fora. At present, an intense battle is underway in the World Intellectual Property Organization, a vital part of the international trade regime in high-end goods and services. There, Brazil, India, and South Africa have launched a major push to revise rules currently stacked in favor of wealthy nations. Blocking their advance is a coalition of the United States, Europe, Japan and—yes, China. This position on China’s part comes at a diplomatic cost with the rest of the emerging powers, but the economic stakes outweigh those considerations.

The evolution within the G-20 tells us the overall pattern of cooperation and competition: that the United States and the major powers share a compelling interest to protect the global system from collapse, but within that system have every incentive to compete—and compete intensively—for

political and economic gain. It should be stressed, however, that they are negotiating *within* the system—negotiating over the rules of the game, yes, but not about the game itself. And for one of the G-20’s top agenda items, the jury is still out. Notwithstanding the sensitivities over the valuation of the RMB, the mutual assessments being led by the IMF could still induce moves by the major economies to bring the global economy into better balance, which would mark a major milestone of postcrisis cooperation.

From Competition to Contention: The World of Energy, Scarcity, and Regional Security

Inevitably, the spheres of regional security and the security of supplies of energy and scarce resources are bound to be more contentious in great power relations. Classic rising power security dilemmas are driving tensions between the United States and China in the South and East China Seas, while more traditional tensions still exist along Russia’s borders with the West. US security concerns with Iran’s nuclear program can be seen within a context of shared interest to avoid proliferation of nuclear weapons, but also have a heavy dose of regional security competition, fueled—so to speak—by rival energy concerns.

Indeed, regional security competition and economic/energy interests are inextricably entwined—in two very different senses. First, regional aggression foments instability that in turn can draw swift retribution from global markets. When Russia intervened in Georgia/Abkhazia in 2008, its stock market plunged by 70 percent the very next day. Second, mercantilist impulses prompted by zero-sum perceptions of scarce resources—and in some cases, actually zero-sum dynamics—are leading to increasingly aggressive strategies of source acquisition. In some of the most volatile cases, unresolved border issues combine with alluring untapped energy (or water) reserves into a witch’s brew of potential conflict.

These issues tend to pit emerging powers not only against the United States, but also against one another. Witness for instance the increasingly sharp rhetoric that India and China trade

over their respective approaches to acquiring food supplies abroad. (Brazil is largely isolated from these dynamics, being largely energy and food self-reliant.) While it is hard to see a direct path to armed conflict arising from this issue, it serves as an irritant in the relationships and a source of tension in domestic politics. This is especially true where all of these dynamics are at play, including in the South China Seas, Central Asia, and along the Himalayan border between India and China. In one subregion, the South China Seas, a combination of search for energy resources, unsettled borders, and divergent threat perceptions are already sowing the seeds of a real security dilemma. As a sign of the incipient mistrust, Chinese fears over possible United States interference with China's energy import supply lines is a factor behind China's more aggressive naval strategy in the South (and East) China Seas—moves that the United States and several of its neighbors view as aggressive, causing them to invest further in denial capability. And thus a dangerous spiral is set in motion.

Yet cooperation has proven possible even on issues ripe for competition, through a combination of US strategy, middle-power activism, and institutional design. Witness the Arctic, where United States, Russian, Canadian, and European interests are seemingly at odds. The middle of the last decade saw the ratcheting up of tensions in the Arctic, with the near outbreak of hostilities between Canada and Russia, mounting US-Russia tensions, and all sides in a competition for the most nationalist rhetoric. Eventually calm was restored, and the United States, Norway, and Denmark worked together to negotiate new arrangements and agreements, including a revamp of the so-far obscure Arctic Council. Most strikingly, all parties, including the United States, agreed to the application of the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea to the resolution of boundary disputes in the Arctic—despite the fact that the US ratification of the treaty continues to languish in the Senate. Looking at these challenges broadly, there may be lessons from the Arctic for new multilateral mechanisms to handle the South China Seas, a point made recently by US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.

It is hard to know, as part of this exercise, where the issue of climate change should be plotted along the cooperation/competition spectrum—probably somewhere between the cooperation on economic issues and contestation over energy, or perhaps straddling them. At one level, climate change is the ultimate “we're all in one boat” issue; it makes not a whit of difference to the overall levels of carbon concentration where a carbon emission happens to enter the atmosphere, and global temperature changes ignore territorial boundaries. Yet this global commons perspective is vague and abstract in comparison with here-and-now economic choices about reducing reliance on carbon-based energy. The economic interests affected by those specific choices can be win-win (as in some elements of clean energy technology innovation), but they can also be win-lose or even lose-lose. There are competitive commercial interests in green technology and widely diverging interests with respect to the international regime for carbon reduction. So divergent, in fact, that nations such as Brazil, South Africa, India, and China (BASIC), that have profoundly different energy needs and climate change mitigation strategies, felt compelled to band together in a “BASIC group” at Copenhagen just to fend off US pressure and ward themselves against a costly deal. These complex negotiations revealed not only the BASIC group's differences with the United States, but important differences among the Western players, notably between Europe on the one hand and the United States and Japan on the other.

Despite these clashes, though, climate change is yet another area where sharp differences with high-stakes interests ultimately yielded to a broadly shared interest in overall forward movement. Modest as the Copenhagen Accord was in comparison with expectations, it did lock in a goal for aggregate reduction of carbon emissions as well as monitoring and verification arrangements. The latter especially had been the subject of fierce dispute between the United States and China. Each side made extremely important concessions to forge an eventual outcome.

Contention in Real Time: Human Rights and Intervention

Vying with the South China Seas dispute for the status of “Most Contentious” are issues of human rights, and rights-based intervention. And then to a lesser degree, the related questions of democracy and development also exhibit important differences among the powers. Of all the policy spheres, these are the issues that most closely hew to a “West versus Rest” dynamic, albeit with important exceptions.

There is significant diversity, of course, of domestic governance within the BRICS group itself. Despite these differences, though, these countries are broadly like-minded in their diplomatic postures on human rights, democratization, and intervention. For the emerging economies in particular, their sensitivities are rooted in experiences as the objects of Western arrogance and failed human rights conditionality from Western aid donors and Western-controlled international financial institutions. They have also harbored fears of potential intervention by the West—although most in the West would point out that that was never a realistic prospect for those specific countries, though perhaps for some of their smaller neighbors. Empathy for smaller developing countries still subject to these pressures and fears is a feature of the emerging powers’ global identity and foreign policy, but more to the point, the emerging powers place a high premium on stability within their regions. In addition, their own experience of Western development aid and human rights pressures tells them the model is wrong. (Recent research from the World Bank suggests they are right.) While civil society groups within these countries could arguably nudge their governments toward a more democracy and human rights oriented foreign policy, such advocacy is unlikely to win out over solidarity against Western interventionism any time soon.

This plays out in the emerging powers’ approach to development. In recent years, Western aid policy has shifted from the paternalistic, donor-driven approach that characterized it for so long, but Western donors’ actual practice has not yet fully reflected this change. As relatively new donors,

the emerging powers carry little such baggage and have been expanding their efforts, particularly in their own regions, with an emphasis on deference to national sovereignty, a lack of conditionality, and genuine partnership. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the club of traditional donors, has been eager to add the emerging economies to their membership, particularly due to these new donors’ influence within their own regions. So far, though, the emerging powers have shown little interest in joining that Western club.

This is not to say that the emerging economies are all hewing to the exact same line. Brazil and Indonesia have stressed a focus on women’s rights and democratic governance, respectively, within their aid programs. India’s blend of aid, investment, and diplomatic muscle within its own region has been described as neo-Curzonian. As it competes with China for influence, it has adopted a more pragmatic approach to economic investment in Africa, linked to trade openness. China of course has massively expanded its economic and aid engagement, in Africa, the South Pacific, and Latin America. In terms of the volume of its investment in Africa, China’s portfolio in the region now rivals that of the United States. In the fuller picture, China’s aid has been dogged by accusations of corruption, exploitive practices, and the use of Chinese rather than African workers.

More recently, there are early indications of a change in approach, as pressure from African civil society groups and the African Union have imposed some reputational costs, and as instability in some areas has threatened China’s investments. In places like Ethiopia, some argue that Chinese investment has done more to create desperately needed jobs than Western aid has. As with many of the issues analyzed above, there are strong shared interests in stability, although events in the Middle East and North Africa have prompted the West to question their own assumptions about the merits of stability. As potential common ground, a concept of stability informed by the rule of law could provide a mutually agreeable starting point on develop-

ment—a point that the United Kingdom has emphasized in negotiations with China in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with substantial success.

West versus Rest dynamics are also evident in international human rights diplomacy. Two patterns can be observed in the record of votes taken in the UN Human Rights Council: the percentage of votes in support of Western positions is declining at roughly the same rate as the West's loss of economic clout; and the emerging powers consistently vote with the G-77. Still, there are exceptions: India recently called for Syria to step aside from its campaign for membership on the council, a modest step perhaps, but notable nonetheless. And beyond the Human Rights Council, there have been important recent instances where these issues have become a source of acute friction—notably on Myanmar and Sri Lanka, the latter involving an alignment of emerging powers with the Sri Lankan authorities resisting an investigation into gross violations of international humanitarian law.

These same divides characterize the Western and emerging power positions on human-rights-based intervention. When Libya's Qaddafi government first began its ruthless military crackdown in early 2011, India, Brazil, and South Africa joined Russia and China in a unanimous Security Council vote to impose sanctions, activate the International Criminal Court, and to label Libyan actions as a violation of the "responsibility to protect"—the first time that norm has been invoked by the council in respect of an active crisis. Three weeks later, though, four of those five withheld their support and abstained on another resolution to forcibly uphold that responsibility. Since the council's approval of the resolution allowed the enforcement to proceed, the abstentions could be interpreted as a glass half full for West/Rest alignment, but within days BRICS activism against the Libya action mounted. It certainly didn't help that the air campaign was turned over to NATO and that none of the rising powers were invited to the United Kingdom-hosted conference to orchestrate the strategy. In truth, the intervention in Libya was

probably sufficient on its own to re-animate deep fissures over the use of force to assert or protect human rights standards. The mistrust of Western intentions is only aggravated by the stark reality that when it comes to global military power the West has it and the others still do not. Yet despite this, just one week after refusing to endorse force to protect civilians in Libya, all five states voted for the use of force to protect civilians in Cote d'Ivoire. This schizoid picture was further reinforced by a divided subsequent vote on sanctioning Syria for its crackdown.

The "responsibility to protect" (R2P) issues have brought out the contradictions in BRICS policy and status more clearly than any other issue. Even here, though, it is simplistic to draw bright clear lines. That would presume Western consistency and constancy on civilian protection issues. As a simple gauge of Western commitment on the issue of protection of democracy and human rights, let us ask how many European or American troops are currently deployed in UN or non-UN missions (other than Afghanistan) with an explicit mandate to protect civilians? Answer: 6,552, but 5,656 of those are in Lebanon where the underlying purpose is the containment of Hezbollah, not civilian protection. But even counting that whole total, it constitutes an awesome 0.002 percent of the active duty personnel of the United States and Europe. Meanwhile, counter to the perception of rising power resistance, China has voted to authorize every single UN peacekeeping operation that was mandated to protect civilians, and India has provided the operational backbone of those missions, with more than 100,000 troops sent to peacekeeping operations since the end of the Cold War. So, contentious, yes; neatly dividing the West from the Rest, or the United States from the emerging powers, no. If the West is to condemn the BRICS for their lack of robust action on R2P, its argument would be more credible if it upped military contribution for protection to, oh, let's be ambitious and say a full 0.01 percent of its military capability. As with the broader sweep of international politics, there's more complexity here than simple cleavage.

Ultimately, though, the most vexed issue dividing the West from at least some of the emerging powers is that of chronic human rights abuses in China and Russia. The question of the implications of China's internal human rights issues for relations with the United States and other powers depends in part on the answers to two questions. Will Western pressure—or alternatively the containment approach advocated by those more wary of China—actually nudge China toward greater openness? And within their own context, are China's leaders genuinely grappling with change in the face of the same kind of trade-offs between closed politics and open markets that tore apart the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia?

This critical debate requires far more space than is available here; nor is the evidence clear one way or another. This point can be made, though: it is hard to see a realistic strategy for containment when so many key players are fundamentally opposed to such an approach—not only India but most of America's European allies as well. Those who continue to advocate a containment strategy are ignoring the rush of German, British, and French business leaders to China, their leading politicians in tow; ignoring the fact that India and China are each other's largest trading partners; and ignoring the nearly \$2 trillion that China holds in US debt.

If containment is unrealistic, this does not mean ignoring human rights abuses in China or Russia—that is neither politically feasible for many Western countries, certainly not for the United States, nor likely to be good policy. If the optimistic scenarios about China's own democratization process hold, it's important for the United States to have been on the right side of history. Equally, it's important for the United States to be seen as wanting China to succeed overall—not merely reluctantly accepting a new challenger on the stage. If not, even a somewhat democratic China will certainly look askance at the United States.

What are the Implications for Strategy?

At a conceptual and rhetorical level, there have been strains of US strategic thought arguing for

an American international posture defined sharply by the democratic and human rights values shared by the Western allies. Yet at no point has this actually been policy. Even when the rhetorical stance of the Bush administration came closest to this, during the early days of the “Axis of Evil,” the Bush administration was cooperating with China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and others in the battle against Al Qaeda. And even in the operation that is the closest thing we can find to a Western coalition depositing terrorists and tyrants in favor of a constitutional republic, NATO's ISAF operation in Afghanistan, the United States had no difficulty accepting the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Singapore as members of that fighting coalition.

While it is probably not worth rehashing the arguments for and against a club or concert or league or alliance of democracies, the key point in this connection is that if we chose human rights, democracy, and intervention as the issues at the center of our strategy for international cooperation, we are selecting precisely the agenda on which contestation is highest and cooperation lowest. In the ongoing debate over the nature of India's shifting policy, for example, imposing a litmus test on intervention will not bolster the case domestically for alignment with the United States. Asking another nation for utmost proof of its liberal bona fides is hardly a wise overture for a new strategic alignment, particularly when that nation has a not-distant history as an imperial colony and a more recent history of fierce foreign policy independence. To add to the folly, it is not smart to expect India to tilt toward the United States if the United States demands a decisive breach with China.

Alternatively, we could just as easily select counterterrorism as an organizing principle, and thereby prioritize the sphere where established and emerging power interests are most closely aligned with the greatest potential for cooperation. In the first part of the George W. Bush administration, after 9/11, that was the essence of US strategy vis-à-vis the great powers. Later, after the financial crisis struck, the Bush and Obama administrations both chose to take an

economically realistic path—sensibly so, given the severity of the financial crisis.

Moving forward, is economic weight a sufficient criterion for guiding cooperation and determining global order arrangements? Or should other principles inform the choices (assuming that “choice” is still an operative concept for determining who sits at the table) of governance arrangements?

In international architecture, history has made this far easier than it might otherwise have been. When it comes to security and intervention questions, Russia and China already have seats at the UN Security Council (UNSC) top table, complete with vetoes. Whatever one thinks of the question of Security Council reform in the medium to long term, it is surely much easier to contemplate, from an American perspective, the business of bringing India, Japan, Germany and even Brazil into the UNSC than it would be to think about bringing China into that body were it not already there.

Beyond the UNSC, and putting aside the option of choosing the most divisive human rights criteria as a basis for organizing international politics, what are the alternatives? To begin with, the success to date and further possibilities of cooperation with the emerging powers on preserving the global economy and financial system and against transnational threats certainly seem worthwhile. We have already taken substantial steps to bring the emerging powers more fully into the governance of the global economy; we should now follow that up with building better tools for cooperation on transnational security threats. That effort can take one of two paths. The first is a functionalist approach that strengthens the infrastructure for cooperation on proliferation (e.g. through the Nuclear Security Summit and the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA]), on terrorism (the soon-to-be launched Global Counter-terrorism Forum is an important start), biological security (new public/private architecture may be needed here), and other issues. This approach has the advantages of being relatively easy to conceive and enjoying support within the Obama administration.

An alternative is more fluid, cross-issue collaboration—perhaps oriented around the similarly fluid G-20 summit process through adding some security issues to the existing G-20 agenda, establishing a G-20 foreign ministers mechanism, or perhaps creating an informal mechanism for consultations among G-8+5 or G-20 national security advisors. This has the disadvantage of begging questions about UNSC reform. UNSC reform, though, is a medium-term enterprise, and informal steps in the meantime are warranted. The flexibility and fluidity of the cross-issue approach, moreover, could prove invaluable. If, for instance, the next major security crisis happens to fall neatly into a functionalist issue/mechanism, fine, but if it’s more crosscutting in nature or has an unexpected dimension, a more fluid body could be much more effective. If there had been a flexible body to help build relations between foreign ministries of the G-8+5 or G-20, we might have seen better cooperative outcomes when Brazil used its Security Council seat to engage in negotiations with Iran, and Brazil, India, and South Africa faced tough votes on intervention in Libya.

Even with this optimistic outlook, managing competition on regional and energy security, never mind cooperation, is a daunting task. These issues demand a different approach. There is ample room for new analyses and ideas on whether rules can be identified that would minimize the likelihood of serious diplomatic conflict, military skirmishes between the powers, or race-to-the-bottom self-help. No easier answers here, but a topic for serious policy deliberation. Evidence from the Arctic and the Horn of Africa tells us that good policy and creative multilateral arrangements may make a difference.

Regional security will be tough as well. Simple realism tells us that China will bolster its capacity to fend off what it sees as American encroachment in the South China Seas; that Russia will keep probing for US and European weaknesses in Eastern Europe; that Brazil will extend its diplomatic influence within its region and beyond; and that South Africa will continue to flex its muscles

in Africa. In several of these regions, the US global security presence and diplomatic influence emerge as the initial point of friction with the emerging powers. But even these altercations will not take the form of the Rest collectively pressuring the West. China is as concerned about Russia's influence in Central Asia as the West is, and vice versa. For India, China is more of a strategic concern than the West—though it is simultaneously a vital trading partner. Balancing one another will be as serious a preoccupation for the emerging powers as cementing their global status or enlarging their economic and political market share and governance share at the expense of the established powers.

In this complexity lies the key to effective US strategy to catalyze effective global action. When the United States sought to isolate Russia over its effort to annex South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Western unity was not the death-blow to Russia's effort—it was China's firm condemnation (along with the negative verdict of investors in the financial markets). When the United States sought to respond to China's growing assertiveness in the South China Seas, the most helpful request for US engagement was not the predictable one from Japan, but that of Vietnam. It wasn't Western calls for Syria to give up its Human Rights Council campaign that proved decisive; it was India's. So long as the United States is viewed by each of the major powers—established and rising—as an important part of the equation, its strategy options are open. The minute we start forming rigidly aligned blocs or devising strategic arrangements to contain China, our options dramatically narrow.

Conclusion

US strategy should put a premium, as it already does, on building up patterns of cooperation and, even more importantly, tools for effective governance in the realm of the global economy and global finance. It should press further and complement these with similar cooperation on those security issues, especially transnational threats, where we have shared interests (e.g. on maritime security with India and food security with Brazil).

And while Security Council reform is a longer-term project, the benefits probably outweigh the nearer-term costs. Finding ways to maintain a balance of interests, or at least dampen conflict, on energy security questions will be a long game indeed, starting with protracted negotiations over climate change. Patient and multilevel diplomacy will be the name of the game in this policy sphere.

If such measures can be successfully combined with the ongoing process of building ever closer bilateral relationships with India and Brazil, and new middle powers like Indonesia, and yes, with China too, then the occasional, inevitable clashes on regional security fronts can be managed. In international politics today, there are currently no fixed blocs. If anything like an overarching or grand strategy is to guide US policy, it should surely be at its base to prevent the emergence of any such distinct global alignment. Complexity, not simplicity, will be the ally of order in the coming era.

Endnote

¹ Bruce Jones, "The Coming Clash? Europe and US Multilateralism under Obama," *The Obama Movement: European and American Perspectives* (eds. Alvaro de Vasconcelos and Marcin Zaborowski), European Union Institute for Security Studies 2009: pp. 63-78.

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